



## Marine Biology

### Sturgeon Reproduction and Population Ecology



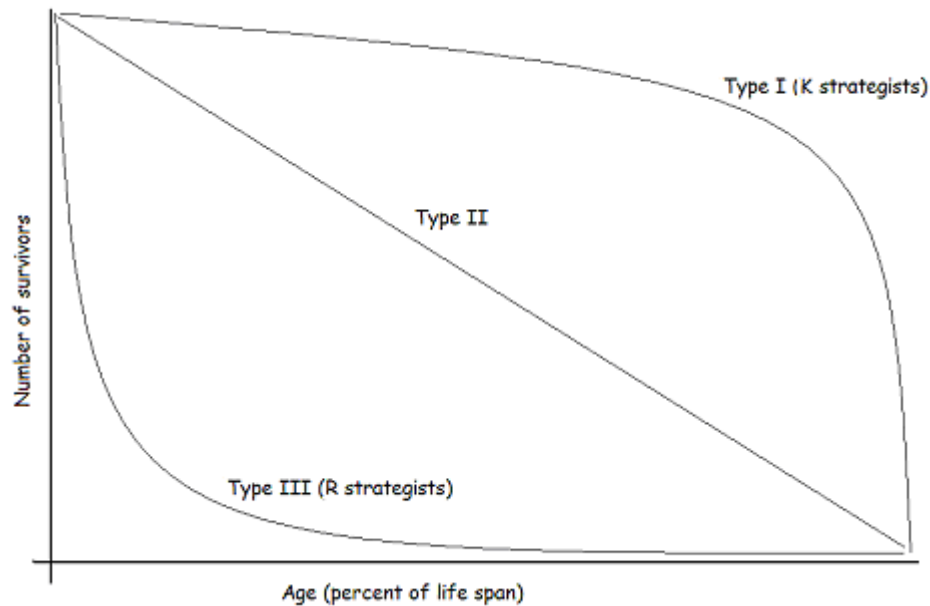
## Introduction

Sturgeon are an anadromous fish species that inhabit rivers, estuaries and the ocean at various stages during their life cycle—and their lifecycle is a long one. Adults can live up to 80 years. After spending up to 3 years in their natal rivers as juveniles, they travel into the oceans until they reach sexual maturity. This may take another 8-20 years, depending on the sex of the fish (females usually take longer to reach sexual maturity) and latitude (sturgeon in the northern rivers generally take longer to reach sexual maturity).

Spawning typically occurs in the in the springtime. Both sexes swim back up their natal rivers to the spawning grounds. Females lay their eggs, which are sticky, and attach to the river's gravel bottom—larger females have been known to lay 800,000 to 3.5 million eggs. The males then fertilize the eggs with milt. The adults leave the eggs to the mercy of the river and their well chosen spawning grounds. Of that egg mass, only 10% will survive to reproduce in the natal river again. The rest die due to predation, water pollution or a menagerie of other causes.

## Survivorship Curves

Below is a graph depicting the three survivorship curves and the names of two parental care strategies commonly found in nature. A survivorship curve illustrates the numbers in a population over the course of time. A strategy depicts how parents care for their offspring.



**Questions:**

Use the survivorship curves and the background information on sturgeon from the introduction to answer the following questions.

1. Which survivorship type do sturgeon employ? Explain your answer.
  
2. List three other organisms that exhibit the same strategy as sturgeon.
  
3. What would be two benefits of this type of parental strategy?

**The next set of questions (4-6) describes the survivorship curve OPPOSITE sturgeon.**

4. Which survivorship curve is opposite the sturgeons'? Explain what is happening with this survivorship type.
  
5. List three organisms that exhibit this parental care strategy.

6. What would be two benefits of this type of parental strategy?

**The next set of questions (7-10) compares all three survivorship curves**

7. Explain where the reproductive energy is focused for each type of parental care strategy.

8. Which type survives best in a crowded ecological niche? Less crowded niche? Explain your answers.

9. There is one survivorship curve that is not employed by sturgeon nor is it the direct opposite curve. Explain what is happening with organisms in this type. What organism would be an example of this type?

10. Some ecologists have dismissed the terms “R” and “K” and have replaced them with the terms “maintenance” and “dispersal.” Match the new terms to the old terms and explain how they are accurately used.